

**Aboriginal Women's Employment in
Non-Traditional and Resource Extractive
Industries in Northern Manitoba:
An Exploration of the Issues**

**Roberta Stout
Maureen Seguin
July 2010**

Project # 216



centres of excellence
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PRAIRIE WOMEN'S HEALTH
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Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence supports new knowledge and research on women's health issues; and provides policy advice, analysis and information to governments, health organizations and non-governmental organizations. Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official views of PWHCE or Health Canada.

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Acronyms

CFS	Child and Family Services
HAP	Hazardous Air Pollutants
HR	Human Resources
GPS	Global Positioning System
NAHO	National Aboriginal Health Organization
PWHCE	Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence
WHMIS	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System

Being Aboriginal and female, I needed to convince them that I can do this – just give me a chance and I'll try.

- Northern Participant

Given the chance, I think all our female Aboriginals can do the same thing. Society has taught them not to believe in themselves. That they can't reach for that job because it's a man's job.

- Northern Participant

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For a number of years, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) Board of Directors have called for greater emphasis of research directed at understanding the health and health needs of Aboriginal women living in northern regions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Given ongoing and increasing industrial development in these regions, and the limited research in the area, it made sense to start with an exploration of how Aboriginal women are participating in and experiencing employment within these industries.

As a primary goal, we wanted to understand issues related to recruitment and retention. In other words, what are the factors that assist Aboriginal women to enter non-traditional industries as well as issues contributing to employment retention? In order to flesh out these opportunities and barriers, the women were asked questions around housing, childcare, health and safety, life skills, women-designated spaces (such as camps/bathrooms etc.), workplace harassment, and differential treatment based on gender and race.

Methodology

The objectives of this exploratory project were:

1. To provide a venue for Aboriginal women to voice their perceptions and experiences within non-traditional and resource extractive industries in Northern Manitoba.
2. To expose the positive and negative socio-economic and health outcomes of non-traditional and resource extractive industries for Aboriginal women, their families and communities.
3. To understand the challenges of recruitment and retention of Aboriginal women within these industries.

A questionnaire was drafted and included 64 questions related to recruitment, training, employment and supports for retention within non-traditional and resource extractive industries (Appendix 1). These questions were used to guide the open-ended interviews. PWHCE Northern Board Directors identified and set up the interviews with nine Aboriginal women who had worked, were working or were training for employment within these industries. Interviews were held over the course of two days in December 2009 both in Thompson and in a smaller community one hour away from Thompson. The principal researcher and one PWHCE Board Director jointly conducted all the semi-structured interviews in the women's homes, a mining camp training room, and various office spaces. All of the

interviews were taped and transcribed from which a thematic analysis approach was utilized to identify themes. While many of the women had positive experiences within their given industries, others had more critical perspectives. In any event, all of the women and workplace names are anonymous within this report.

This report is separated into 4 sections. The first gives an introductory overview and provides details on the methods and procedures. Part two looks at how the women became aware of employment positions and their reasons for entering into their respective careers. It also highlights any training they received as well as their first impressions and supports as they transitioned into the workplace. This is followed by a section related to the supports identified which would assist their entrance and retention within non-traditional workplaces as well as the women's perceptions around northern industrial development. The report concludes with recommendations and next steps.

Recommendations

This project was an initial exploration into the socio-economic and health issues experienced by Aboriginal women who had worked, were currently employed or training for employment within non-traditional and resource extractive industries. A number of recommendations can be gleaned from the conversations held with the women related to training opportunities and social supports necessary for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal women within the workforce.

Training Opportunities for Increasing the Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal Women within non-Traditional and Resource Extractive Industries

Income Transition and Money Management

- ⇒ *Develop personal training opportunities to assist new Aboriginal women employees to manage the transition from social assistance to earned income.*
- ⇒ *Tailor workshops on money management for current Aboriginal women employees.*

Gender-Based Rights in the Workplace

- ⇒ *Introduce mandatory gender-based analysis training for employees across all positions, including management, to foster a workforce where there is zero tolerance for gender-based sexual harassment or intimidation.*
- ⇒ *Revisit and revise wage levels between men and women employees to ensure pay equity for comparable positions.*

Aboriginal Rights in the Workforce

- ⇒ *Institute Aboriginal awareness workshops within training and professional development for employees across all positions, including management, in order to challenge and eradicate workplace racism.*

Workplace Health and Safety

- ⇒ *Ensure proper and ongoing health and safety training for Aboriginal women employees to reduce potential workplace injuries.*

Social Supports for Increasing the Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal Women within non-Traditional and Resource Extractive Industries

Childcare

- ⇒ *Engage industries and surrounding communities to jointly offset the patchwork of childcare currently available to Aboriginal women through the creation of daycares (in communities where no daycare currently exists) or the provision of more childcare spaces (in communities where there are daycares).*
- ⇒ *Ensure flexibility of childcare services to take into account shift, weekend, extended and irregular work hours required by the workplace.*
- ⇒ *Rethink how industries can accommodate transportation, scheduling and childcare needs for school-aged children (i.e. before and after school programs).*

Women-Designated Spaces

- ⇒ *Continue to provide women designated spaces including washrooms, showers and living quarters.*
- ⇒ *Construct underground washrooms (in mines) for women.*

Recreational Activities

- ⇒ *Improve the quality of life within on-site camps through the introduction of recreational activities, including bonspiels, skating rinks, weight and games rooms and other social events.*

Next Steps

In the second phase of this work, PWHCE will be turning our attention to understanding the socio-economic perspectives of women working within non-traditional and resource extractive industries in northern Saskatchewan. Will Aboriginal women have different experiences and viewpoints of these industries and their work within them?

L'EMPLOI DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DANS DES SECTEURS NON TRADITIONNELS AU SEIN DE L'INDUSTRIE D'EXTRACTION DE RESSOURCES DU NORD MANITOBAIN UNE EXPLORATION DES GRANDS THÈMES

RÉSUMÉ

Introduction

Depuis un certain nombre d'années, le Centre d'excellence pour la santé des femmes de la région des Prairies (CESFP) insiste sur la nécessité d'orienter la recherche vers l'analyse de l'état de santé et des besoins des femmes autochtones vivant dans le nord du Manitoba et de la Saskatchewan. Vu le développement industriel important que connaissent ces régions et la rareté des travaux sur le sujet, il nous a semblé pertinent de commencer par une exploration de la participation des travailleuses autochtones au sein des différentes industries et de leur expérience.

Notre but premier était d'examiner les questions relatives au recrutement et au maintien en emploi. Quels sont les facteurs qui incitent les femmes autochtones à se diriger vers des industries non traditionnelles et à y rester? Afin d'offrir une analyse étoffée des possibilités et des obstacles en jeu, nous avons interrogé les principales intéressées sur des sujets comme le logement, les services de garde, la santé et la sécurité, les aptitudes à la vie quotidienne, les espaces désignés (habitations, salles d'eau, etc.), le harcèlement au travail et le traitement différentiel fondé sur le sexe et la race.

Méthodologie

Voici la liste des objectifs de notre étude exploratoire :

1. Offrir aux femmes autochtones une occasion de transmettre leurs perceptions et leurs expériences relativement à l'emploi non traditionnel et à l'industrie d'extraction de ressources dans le Nord manitobain.
2. Mettre au jour les incidences socioéconomiques et sanitaires, positives ou négatives, de l'emploi non traditionnel et de l'industrie extractive sur les femmes autochtones, leurs familles et leurs communautés.
3. Cerner les défis en matière de recrutement et de maintien en emploi des travailleuses autochtones dans ce secteur.

Nous avons préparé un questionnaire englobant plus de 64 questions sur des thèmes comme le recrutement, la formation, le travail et les mesures de maintien

dans un domaine d'emploi non traditionnel et dans le secteur de l'industrie extractive (annexe 1). Ces questions devaient guider les entretiens qualitatifs semi-structurés que nous allions mener par la suite. Le conseil d'administration du CESFP a sélectionné neuf femmes autochtones ayant travaillé ou qui travaillent dans l'industrie extractive, ou qui suivaient une formation à cette fin. Les entrevues se sont déroulées pendant deux jours, en décembre 2009, dans la ville de Thompson et dans une petite localité à une heure de celle-ci. Elles ont été menées par la chercheuse principale du projet et un membre du conseil en différents endroits : au domicile des travailleuses, dans la salle de formation du campement et dans différents bureaux. Les entretiens ont tous été enregistrés et transcrits; ils ont été analysés de façon à en dégager les grands thèmes. Même si de nombreuses participantes rapportent vivre une expérience positive, d'autres ont exprimé un point de vue plus critique. Par souci de respect de la vie privée, ni le nom des répondantes ni ceux des lieux de travail ne sont divulgués en ces pages.

Notre rapport est divisé en quatre parties. La première présente un survol du projet et fournit des détails sur les méthodes de recherche. La deuxième explique comment les répondantes ont pris connaissance des postes offerts et expose les raisons qui les ont incitées à choisir leurs carrières respectives. Nous décrivons également la formation qu'elles ont reçue, ainsi que leurs premières impressions et les mesures de soutien mises à leur disposition pendant la période d'adaptation à leur nouveau milieu de travail. Dans la troisième partie, nous passons en revue les mesures susceptibles de faciliter l'intégration et le maintien en poste des travailleuses au sein d'un milieu non traditionnel et nous relevons les perceptions de celles-ci à l'égard du développement industriel dans le nord de la province. Enfin, nous présentons des recommandations ainsi que les étapes suivantes du projet.

Recommandations

Notre étude se voulait une première exploration des questions d'ordre socioéconomique et sanitaire intéressant les femmes autochtones ayant travaillé ou qui travaillent dans un domaine d'emploi non traditionnel au sein de l'industrie d'extraction des ressources, ou suivent une formation en vue de s'y préparer. Un certain nombre de recommandations se dégagent des entretiens auprès des travailleuses interrogées; elles se rapportent à des possibilités de formation et à des mesures de nature sociale susceptibles de favoriser le recrutement et le maintien en poste des femmes autochtones au sein de l'effectif.

Possibilités de formation destinées à améliorer le recrutement et le maintien en poste des femmes autochtones dans les emplois non traditionnels au sein de l'industrie d'extraction des ressources

Changement de revenu et gestion du budget

- ⇒ *Mettre au point des occasions de formation visant à faciliter la transition entre l'aide sociale et le travail rémunéré.*
- ⇒ *Organiser des ateliers sur la gestion budgétaire destinés aux employées autochtones en poste.*

Droits des femmes en matière de travail

- ⇒ *Dispenser à tous les employés sans exception, y compris les cadres, une formation obligatoire sur l'analyse des influences du genre et du sexe, dans l'objectif d'établir un milieu de travail souscrivant au principe de la tolérance zéro en matière de harcèlement sexuel et d'intimidation fondée sur le sexe.*
- ⇒ *Comparer les niveaux de rémunération entre hommes et femmes et les ajuster de façon à instaurer la parité salariale pour des postes comparables.*

Droits des Autochtones en matière de travail

- ⇒ *Intégrer des ateliers de sensibilisation au volet formation continue dans le but d'éliminer le racisme au travail, destinés à tous les employés sans exception, y compris les cadres.*

Santé et sécurité au travail

- ⇒ *Procurer aux femmes autochtones une formation adéquate en matière de santé et sécurité au travail afin de réduire les risques d'accident.*

Mesures de soutien social destinées à améliorer le recrutement et le maintien en poste des femmes autochtones dans les emplois non traditionnels et l'industrie d'extraction des ressources

Services de garde

- ⇒ *Inciter les entreprises et les localités avoisinantes à collaborer à l'établissement de services de garde (dans les lieux où il n'en existe pas) ou d'un plus grand nombre de places en garderie (dans ceux où il en existe), afin de suppléer les solutions disparates dont disposent les femmes autochtones à ce chapitre.*
- ⇒ *Garantir la souplesse des services de garde en tenant compte des quarts de travail, des fins de semaine, des heures supplémentaires et des horaires irréguliers imposés par le milieu de travail.*
- ⇒ *Repenser la façon dont les entreprises répondent aux besoins des enfants d'âge scolaire en matière de transport, d'horaires et de services de garde (c.-à-d. avant et après l'école).*

Espaces désignés

- ⇒ *Continuer à fournir aux femmes des espaces désignés, notamment des toilettes, des douches et des lieux de résidence.*
- ⇒ *Construire des salles de toilette sous terre (dans les mines) réservées aux femmes.*

Activités de loisir

- ⇒ *Améliorer la qualité de vie dans les camps en offrant des activités de loisir, notamment des tournois de curling, des patinoires, des salles de musculation et de jeux, ainsi que d'autres activités à caractère social.*

Étapes suivantes

Dans le second volet de son projet de recherche, le CESFP compte se pencher sur les perspectives socioéconomiques des femmes qui occupent un emploi non traditionnel au sein de l'industrie extractive dans le nord de la Saskatchewan. L'expérience et la perception des femmes autochtones de cette région différeront-elles de celles de leurs collègues du Manitoba?

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

For a number of years, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) Board Directors have called for greater emphasis of research directed to understanding the health and health needs of Aboriginal women living in northern regions of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Given ongoing and increasing industrial development in these regions, and the limited research in the area, it made sense to start with an exploration of how Aboriginal women are participating and experiencing employment within these industries. Certainly there is limited research in this area (NAHO, 2008).

This project set out to meet with individual Aboriginal women who had been employed, were currently employed, or were participating in training programs for work within non-traditional jobs. We focused our discussions with women from two communities: Thompson and a smaller community one hour away from Thompson. Women came forward to talk about their experiences working within the mining and hydro industries as well as a number of other non-traditional fields, such as GPS surveying.

As a primary goal, we wanted to understand issues related to recruitment and retention. In other words, what are the factors that assist Aboriginal women to enter into non-traditional industries and what are the issues which contribute to employment retention? In order to flesh out these opportunities and barriers, the women were asked questions around housing, childcare, health and safety, life skills, women-designated spaces (such as camps/bathrooms etc.), workplace harassment, and differential treatment based on gender and race. A number of recommendations which arose from the information provided by the women will conclude the report.

Methodology

This exploration involved a collaborative team approach. The principle researcher and PWHCE Board Directors from northern Manitoba met through teleconferences and one in-person meeting during the summer and fall of 2009 to draft the objectives, activities and timeline of the project. The objectives were:

1. To provide a venue for Aboriginal women to voice their perceptions and experiences of non-traditional and resource extractive industries in Northern Manitoba.
2. To expose the positive and negative socio-economic and health outcomes of non-traditional and resource extractive industries for Aboriginal women, their families and communities.

3. To understand the challenges of recruitment and retention of Aboriginal women within these industries.

A questionnaire was drafted and included 64 questions related to recruitment, training, employment and supports for retention within non-traditional and resource extractive industries (Appendix 1). These questions were used to guide the open-ended interviews. PWHCE Board Directors identified and set up the interviews with nine Aboriginal women who had worked, were working or were training for employment within these industries. Interviews were held over the course of two days in December 2009 both in Thompson and in a small community one hour away from Thompson. The principal researcher and one PWHCE Board Director jointly conducted all the semi-structured interviews in the women's homes, the mining camp training room, and various office spaces. All of the interviews were taped and transcribed from which a thematic analysis approach was utilized to identify themes. While many of the women had positive experiences within their given industries, others had more critical perspectives. In any event, all of the women and workplace names are anonymous within this report.

The Women

A total of nine women from northern Manitoba participated in the study. They ranged in age from 28 to 63 and identified as Aboriginal, including four women who identified as Métis and four who identified as First Nations. One of the women did not specify her Aboriginal ancestry. Their educational backgrounds were diverse, including one woman who had completed Grade 6, and a few who had attended college and/or university. One had studied mining at the college level, and another had achieved several work-related certificates including Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), Hazardous Air Pollutants (HAP), and Food Handling.

While all of the women had some experience working in non-traditional and resource extractive industries, not all were employed at the time of the interview. Two were on sick leave, one was laid off, and two were attending a training program in preparation for future employment in the mining industry. Similarly, their main source of income varied. One woman had a part-time job in addition to her position at a mine, one was collecting employment insurance and another social assistance, and one was working as a caterer. Two of the women were actively working in a resource extractive industry during the time of the interview.

The women held a large variety of positions in their fields. The majority of participants were employed (or had been employed at some time) in the mining industry, with one woman employed in hydro and one woman who had previously worked as a Global Positioning System (GPS) surveyor and as a base manager at a small airport. Within the mining field, the women held the following positions:

accounts payable clerk, mine clerk and account manager, cage tender¹ and backfill operator, lab rock crusher and housekeeper. In addition, two women were in training to enter mineral processing. While one participant identified as a clerk and account manager within her company, the true scope of her position was actually more fulsome in nature. She elaborates this in the following:

I do safety orientations. Like the safety inductions when people come in. Right now I do group transport, which is getting our people from the airport in [community] and from [community] back there. And camp manager, I look after the camp, people coming and going. Making sure the camp rooms are ready and everything. I'm the clerk as well, so I do whatever's thrown at me, like basic typing of things, sending out emails, reminders of our surface tours, underground tours and work place safety and health committee meetings and stuff like that. I try to keep myself busy anyway, try to find out anything I can do. I do water readings, I just go out and take the water levels and enter it on the computer. Track the costs for [the company]. And I help out in payroll. I do quite a bit actually.

The women reported a variety of work schedules. One woman, who worked as a cook at a hydro camp, worked 3:00 am to 1:00 pm - 40 days on, 40 days off. While she was working, she lived at the camp. Another woman, who did not do shift work, speculated that a lot of the other women employed at the company work 4 days on, 4 days off and live in the women's trailer at the camp. One participant reported that she enjoyed working 7 days straight, and then having 7 days off. And another woman worked at a mine office from Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Limitations

With the exception of 3 participants, all of the women were currently employed or training for work within the non-traditional and resource extractive industries. We found that those who were no longer employed within this workforce brought forth more specific criticisms of the industry. This could be in part because they were no longer tied to the employer and therefore could speak more freely. In addition, although the women were working within non-traditional industries, almost half, or 4, of them were employed in "traditional" women's positions, including housekeeping, cooking and clerical/administration. As well we recognize that this is a small sampling and is therefore not representative. To garner a more fulsome picture of the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal women and northern industrial development, a further study would need to include a greater number of women, in a broader number of traditional and non-traditional positions, as well as those no longer working within these industries.

¹ This woman specified that she "brings the men up and down from a thousand [feet below ground] to the surface, back and forth and skipping waste [bringing up waste from mine] and shaft inspections."

This report now turns to the results and findings from the interviews conducted, starting with how the women became aware of employment opportunities and their experiences within non-traditional and resource extractive industries.

PART 2

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Over the course of two days in December 2009, nine women were interviewed in order to understand their experiences and perspectives on the opportunities and challenges related to recruitment and retention within non-traditional industries. The following section will look to how they became aware of employment positions and their reasons for entering into their respective careers. It will also highlight any training they received as well as their first impressions and supports as they transitioned into the workplace. It concludes with the women's perceptions around northern industrial development and community economic benefits.

Recruitment

Each interview began with asking the participants how they became aware of employment in the industry. From this starting point a variety of responses were observed. They primarily had to do with work, family and community connections. For example, one woman spoke of the personal community-based connections as her foray into the field. She stated:

I was doing housekeeping down at the house at the lake. [T]he boys I was working with were working at the mine. The boys told me 'why don't you work down at the mine?' and I said 'they won't hire me.' But anyway I put a resume in. They asked me a few questions and I answered and they said I got the job. So I started the next day.

One woman noted that her interest in working for a mining company was peaked after attending a community meeting. Upon indicating an interest to the employer she received an offer of employment almost immediately. Two women mentioned that they were made aware that a mine was coming to the community and so became interested in the potential for employment. Another woman recounts how a family connection resulted in her employment with a contractor:

My sister was actually the outreach worker at the time in town and she was constantly trying to get people jobs. [A male contractor] phoned her and said he needed 7 people to come work and she said, 'do you have a problem hiring women?' and he said 'absolutely not.' She said, 'I had my sister who was really interested.' And he said, 'Okay send her down.' So, that's how I began, I started with [that] contract[or]. I worked with them for about 3 months.

After her 3 month term of employment with this contractor, her connection to her employer created an opportunity to work in a mine:

I was outside digging trenches one day. I was approached by another company. They came and approached me and said, 'I see in your resume that you have office experience. Would you be interested in a position with us?' And I said 'Absolutely.' So he went and talked to my current boss and he told him that 'I will be taking [woman's name]. I know you will be laying her off within the next couple of weeks, the job will be done.' He said 'do you have a problem with me taking her?' And he said, 'not at all. And it would be good for her. She is a good worker.' So I started the next day.

Again referring to the significance of family connections in recruitment, this woman also helped her sister, who formerly was the outreach worker, gain employment at the mine as well:

I helped her get that job. [A male staff member] had asked me, 'Is there anybody around quite like you?' I was assertive, I'm not shy. I was very outgoing, very capable of doing my work. And I said, 'Well, I'll tell you this, there's only two women in this world that I fear, my mother and my sister.' I said, 'If you thought I was strong, wait until you meet my sister.' And he said, 'We're looking for more cage tenders.' So I said I will get her resume. She had better skills being in the office than to be on the cage, so they gave her an office job. She's moving on up there, she's a camp manager, mine clerk, responsible for a lot of things out there. I pushed her in the right direction I guess.

Similar to some of the routes women cited as how they became aware of jobs, one woman stated that a personal connection had interested her in entering the resource extractive industry: "[a friend] enjoys herself and got me interested." Another mentioned that family members had taken the training course in which she was currently enrolled, and had heard positive things from them: "It sounds really challenging and interesting...something's always happening. That's my reasons I guess."

The women all had different reasons for entering into their respective positions within the industries. Some wanted to 'try something different.' Some were attracted by the income and others knew of people who enjoyed working in their chosen field.

Of the two of the women who wanted to 'try something different', they were also aware ahead of time that a mine was coming to the community. According to one of the women,

I knew of the mine starting up. So, I applied and when I got the opportunity for an interview, I took it, 'cause I used to work at the council office in [community]. But I figured I wanted something different, so when I was granted the interview, they hired me within two weeks.

In the case of the second woman, while she also stated wanting to try something different as a career, she also recognized that she would excel within a physically demanding environment. She stated:

I was in the employment and training office actually. We knew [the mine] was coming. At the employment and training here it progressed to getting accepted, to getting my head ready to going to the field then there I was. I wanted to try something different. I went to university to become a teacher and I didn't feel that was what I wanted to do. I've always been a hard worker, I've always been outside, helping my dad. I just knew that I needed a job that would be physically demanding for me, for myself. I needed the physical work.

Although having completed a diploma in mining, to her dismay and frustration, she was placed in the position as a cage operator instead of miner. When asked why she had not yet been given an opportunity to work as a miner, she replied:

I don't know. I was misled by somebody. I got hired two or three weeks before I graduated and when the job opportunity came. I'm very happy [company] gave me the job but I wish I had taken more precaution before saying yes. I was just happy I got a job right away before graduation.

Other women spoke directly to the financial incentives involved with working at the mine. Another stated, "For me, it was a better job, there's not much happening to look forward to. I want to get off social assistance." And another woman related, "It was more money than what I was getting. So I had taken that, it was a good offer, and benefits."

Of note, one of the women makes mention of the multiple stars that aligned allowing her to enter the workplace. For one, training was made available to her within her community. In other words, she did not have to leave home for an extended period to take a training course. Additionally, she no longer had to worry about child care (which will be discussed at greater length in a later section of the paper). She stated:

Career change is one of the things that enticed me. And that the training is being done in town here. I don't think I would have got into it if it was elsewhere. Also, my youngest is 14 now, so I don't have as many challenges with child care, so I'm able to do something like this now.

Another woman also spoke to the diversity of qualities, both at a personal level and within the industry, which drove her to work for a mining company. She cited the promotion of Aboriginal people within the workforce, a general lack of non-industry jobs within the north, wanting to take on a personal challenge, being mechanically inclined, and the availability of employment training as contributing factors for her entrance into the mining industry. She stated:

My choice of career has something to do with anything to promote the Aboriginal people or to build their capacity. I've always been an advocate that way. I needed challenges all the time. I'm a sucker for punishment. We also lived in a log house near the lake that needed repairs. I learned how to wire; I burnt out tree sanders fixing up this log house. I learned how to pump water, try to fix small motors. I look at it and try to figure out how it works and get it going again. So that's when I heard that there is a possible training thing coming up at the mine and would keep a pool of people in their back up pool. So, in the crusher area, if someone is missing or going on holidays and they are short on people, they'll draw from that pool. That's how I started out.

This woman started out as a crusher, but quickly moved into the lab in the gold mine (crushing using miniature crushing machines), and eventually into the fire assay.

Training

Not all of the women received training prior to their entry into the workplace, for different reasons. In one case the woman had sufficient prior experience for her position. In another case, there was no experience required. In other situations, women spoke to the need for training but that it was not adequately provided.

For example, one woman stated that she had not received sufficient training for either her position as a GPS surveyor, nor as a base manager for an airline company. She critically related how the company thought that training was unnecessary since it was more interested in funding and less so in a successful employee. In her own words, she stated "I think they figured it was going to be a wash anyway, so they sent me out there with only one day of training. Set up to fail. [I]t's almost as if they just wanted it to be a wash just so they can get some bogus funding." In another position she held as a base manager for a charter airline company, she remembered, "Right there again, thrown in a position, had 3 days training for it. And 3 days of training was definitely not enough."

That said, training was made available and was required for other positions. As alluded to above, some of the women had been trained specifically by the company they later worked for.

The women were asked to speak about their training experiences, which yielded a variety of responses. As noted, one woman expressed frustration, as she was not given the job she had trained to do:

I have not actually done anything that I've trained to do. The whole training course we have done, I have not done any of that. I got put on the cage and stayed on the cage. I was trained as a miner. And then when I got hired on, they trained me again for 5 weeks as cage tender. So really, personally I don't think I

needed the mine training course to be a cage tender. They just trained me all over again anyway. I would really enjoy doing what I'm trained to do. I would like to be a miner. I'd like to work on the jack leg. I'd like to be drilling and doing everything I thought I'd be doing but it didn't turn out that way.

At the time of the interview, two participants enrolled in a training program for mineral processing. When asked about their experiences to that point, both agreed that overall it was positive. Interestingly, as the group was composed primarily of male trainees, the women indicated a tangible camaraderie amongst the cohort group. One of them made the following comment, "Yeah, the 3 women are from town here, so we know each other. Everyone is helpful. If anyone is stuck, you can ask anyone and they will be there to help any way they can."

On a different level, one woman made note of training disparities. She stated that while there were training opportunities afforded to potential employees, these were at times based on Aboriginal ancestry or place of residence. As a First Nations person she was unable to access training for these reasons. She stated:

Just being from a small community, being Treaty and being in this community, it's a Métis community. You always see in the outreach office, there's always hydro training, heavy equipment operator training, being offered. Every time I went to apply for it, they go 'oh you're Treaty, you can't take it. It's only for Métis.' I also had the same problem going to [another community], 'well you don't live here.' I always felt like I wasn't allowed, I wasn't included in anything. I felt bad for being Treaty sometimes. I just wished I was equal. Even if you're Métis or Treaty, you can still take the training. Even if you weren't Status. I just figured.

Transition into the Workplace

Generally, the women felt that access to support services as they transitioned to a career could be improved. Some of the women spoke to job shadowing and on-the-job training which could lead to an improved transition into the workforce. One woman spoke directly to this:

I think there will be that transition period. We're to mail out to the different areas that we are being trained for, but it's not in operation right now. If it was in operation, we would be able to see more of what we are getting into. And if it is was in operation, we would already be having some hands on shadow training with the workers that are already there. That is the plan but the mine is shut down, so that's not happening soon.

Another woman outlined the barriers of implementing supports for Aboriginal women as they transitioned into their careers. She noted that due to the overall low numbers of Aboriginal people generally, and Aboriginal women specifically within

the industries, there would simply not be the demand for these types of supports. In addition, according to her, the mine is a “profit making business so you have to look at the feasibility of it.”

Some of the women spoke to the transition from being on social assistance to having full time work. As one woman mentioned, there are real difficulties associated with the lack of a grace period between entering the workforce and losing social assistance:

I've been on welfare for maybe 4-5 years and there's always this water bill and hydro and so when you're cut off you're stuck with that water bill and that hydro bill. They will not look after it even if it's their bill that they should be looking after it. That's what happened to me when I went off of welfare. And I thought oh my goodness I thought welfare is paying for my hydro and I went to the hydro office but I guess that's where I made the mistake, it was a late payment and it just added on, added on, added on. I ended up paying \$ 800.00 or something for my hydro bill. And that's exactly what's happening to my daughter, she's cut off hydro now and it's just her water bill she's fighting with. So that's really hard on these younger girls like there's no grace period. Poof and you're out.

Community Economic Development

The participants generally thought that the industries had led to greater economic development in their regions and that the community had been improved as a result of these industries. When asked about the economic benefits arising from northern industries, one woman stated:

When we hired our human resources person, she's local so she got a lot of local people hired on which wouldn't happen with the other human resource people that were here. So, everybody's thankful for [her]. She's given everybody the opportunity of employment which is good. It's helped this community a lot.

This woman clarified that the human resource (HR) person had made a point of hiring Aboriginal people, but also “anybody in general that lives in the community.” Another woman answered, “I see a lot of our town’s people getting jobs out here. I don’t see anything negative about the company at all. I’ve seen it produce a lot of jobs here like for myself, my sister and a lot of locals.”

For the small northern community, the introduction of training opportunities and jobs “at home” is viewed as a positive development. Some of the women stated that their perception of the industry had improved only as a result of working within the field. For example one woman spoke about the complexity of the industry, of which she had been previously unaware:

I never even knew what mining was or how it went or anything or how it came to be or nothing. Nothing, just the construction bits of it, it's just wow! We had the electricians, the blue lights, all the piping and all that was done above ground surface here. I worked with the company that did all that.

The women were asked whether they would recommend a career within non-traditional industries, like mining, to other Aboriginal women. For the most part, the response was an overwhelming 'yes.' Their recommendation stemmed from the economic independence one would achieve along with the general feeling expressed that more women are needed within the workforce. One woman elaborated on why more Aboriginal women, and men, should enter these industries:

To get them off social assistance because almost all these girls in town live off of welfare. But it's not going to be there for us all the time. That's the way I look at it. I got my daughter working there now. She's off welfare. I'm proud of her. And I have my son. I told my son "they are going to give training here, why don't you give it a try?" He got in and starts in January.

Another participant stated the pride that she feels seeing women doing this type of non-traditional work:

I'm for everybody, for anybody to work here, especially I'd like to see a lot more women. I noticed the training they listed, there's 3 women. I'd like to see more women underground. My sister is underground and I would really like to see more women there.

As part of the interview, the women were asked to reflect on how being employed had improved or changed their economic situation as well as their views on budgeting. While two women stated that their incomes were either not sufficient, i.e. feeling overworked and underpaid, there was general agreement that their economic situations had improved as a result of working within these northern industries. This, in turn, had produced positive outcomes on their lives.

For some women, receiving a salary was a marked difference from receiving employment insurance or social assistance. This was well reflected by one woman who had previously been on social assistance and found that she could not make ends meet. She stated, "[I] could not make it at \$500.00 a month. I could not even pay rent. Everything included, my rent, food payment, truck, car payments stuff like that. I could not do it, so I had to get a job."

Another woman corroborates this by noting that even though she felt her salary was being heavily taxed, it still outweighs the alternatives of being on employment insurance or social assistance.

A few women continued to struggle with budgeting and saving money. One stated, "I'm still behind. I can't even afford to buy new tires or new upgrades or take my

truck in to get service. I can't get ahead. I make it but I can't get ahead. I mean, I can't save up. Something's always coming up."

Given their incomes, women spoke of differing levels of money management and monthly budgeting. In one case, a woman told of knowing her exact income and expenditures. She stated:

I know exactly how much I have to pay and I know exactly how much everything is. And by the time I pay everything off I still have an amount in the bank because I am not a gambler, I don't drink, I don't smoke. So that saves me a lot of money there. You know when I used to smoke I'd spend 500 to 600 dollars a month.

Another woman speculated that mothers in particular are good money managers. This could be tied to the fact that many are single parents and are responsible for taking care of the household on their one income. According to her, "They're all mothers so they know how to budget their money. They know how to manage. They know what goes to where and what goes to what and what goes to the table. So I believe that they know what to do with their money."

Nonetheless, when probed, many stated that they would be in favour of money management training from companies. Many felt that such training would be beneficial not only for themselves, but for a variety of people entering their industry. Specifically they indicated that money management workshops for young people would be very beneficial. One stated,

For the young moms and for the young teenagers that just come from high school, they should learn how to manage their money. This is their first job, by the next day, they're broke. They have to learn how to manage their money. [I]t's money [teenagers] never had before, so they're gonna go hog wild and do what they want. [J]ust for the young moms and the kids that come out of high school.

Another woman provided a similar statement:

For me, I'm hard on my two daughters and now they know how to manage money because I won't let them [spend money] unless it's very, very important. Especially my youngest one, my 20 year old, she's having a hard time thinking 'okay I have lots of money but what do I do with it?' and then she goes and spends it all and she's broke for two weeks. I've got bills to pay and you've got bills to pay so something like that would help them. I'm thinking, it would be better for them.

Others confirmed that they would also benefit from such training:

Even myself I would do that. Yes. I do have a problem with saving money. You get to pay day and I would be broke within a day or two because you have bills to pay. I would eventually borrow money from my family, my father and my mother.

Then pay day, gotta start dishing it out. Gotta pay for groceries for me and my son.

Some felt that such training was not necessarily up to the company to provide by itself. One possible partnership proposed to the women involved the Northern Aboriginal Women's group, to which the participants were receptive.

In Sum

In sum, the women stated a multitude of reasons for entering into non-traditional and resource extractive industries. These ranged from wanting a better income to wanting physically demanding work. They spoke of the lack of non-traditional employment opportunities within the north and the ability to stay within their community for training and employment. The women spoke to different experiences related to workplace training. While training opportunities appeared insufficient and inadequate for the majority of the participants, others were involved and enjoying targeted programs for future work. Others voiced their frustration at their training not being recognized by their employers. In addition to the preference for more directed and recognized training opportunities, the women also indicated a need for a variety of transition supports into the workplace. These included such things as job shadowing, mentoring and training on moving from social assistance to income generation. On the whole, the women indicated that northern development has led to community economic development by way of employment opportunities "at home", economic security and independence. At the same time they recommended training opportunities around budgeting and money management.

PART 3

SUPPORTS FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Another important piece of this exploratory research was to understand the challenges faced by Aboriginal women employed within non-traditional industries. This section will focus on barriers expressed by the women as well as opportunities to create better supports for their participation in northern economic and industrial development. Areas explored included childcare, housing, women-centred supports, health and safety and life skills development.

Housing and Childcare

The interviewees reported a variety of housing situations. One was renting a trailer from her parents, two owned their own houses, one owned a trailer and lived at the mining camp while working, one lived in Manitoba Housing and one lived with her parents. The women generally reported that their employment did not change their housing costs, with the exception of the participant living in Manitoba Housing. As an employed person, her previous housing subsidy, which was based on income received through social assistance, was altered to reflect her employment income.

Most of the women did not live with a partner, and had dependents living in the household. Five had children residing in their residences, and two had grandchildren living with them. One woman had no dependents.

Childcare was identified as a significant issue for women living and working in both of the communities where this research was conducted. Although Thompson does have at least 11 daycare centres, the smaller community one-hour away did not. In both cases, the women spoke to some degree about this lack in social services, which effectively limits the ability of many women, particularly single mothers, from fully participating in and benefiting from northern development. Therefore the lack of childcare was identified by many as one of the most pressing supports needed by women to enter and stay within the industries. As stated by one participant, "You can't get to work if you don't have daycare." It has also meant that many of them have had to develop multiple strategies for childcare, relying on a patchwork of family members, schools and daycare spaces -where available.

One participant stated that that conflicts with workday and school hours and the lack of childcare support to fill in the gaps is a tangible reason why many are left out of these jobs:

There [are] a lot of single mothers out there that do want to work but it's daycare and schooling. Here, it's an 8 - 4 job and school starts from 9 - 3:30. It's that extra hour and a half that's hard to find somebody that is willing to baby sit.

Due to the nature of non-traditional employment, many women are also required to do shift work or several days on and several days off. For many of them, this irregular working schedule can present great difficulty for them. One woman spoke of the challenge of juggling childcare and work, especially with shift work, in the following:

When I was working night shift, I'd come home, I'd be home by 6. I'd stay up until 8, get him ready and all, send him off to school, then I'd go and sleep until 3 and then he would come home from school. I'd spend a couple of hours with him and then I'd go back to work. It was only hard because I'd never spent time away from him like that, like over night, like night shift working like that.

As a result of the lack of daycare within their respective communities, many of the women talked about having to rely on parents and other family members to help in childcare responsibilities. Grandparents therefore become very important in supporting the retention of Aboriginal women within the industry. One explained how fortunate she was to have her parents nearby to assist her with her children:

[W]ell with childcare right now, I do have a wonderful set of parents. I'm lucky, I'm very fortunate for them that they watch my boys. My 3 year old son, grandma watches him, gets him off to school. The older one well, I start at 8 in the morning, so I get them up early. They are up with me. My oldest son, I usually try to get him to sleep at grandma's at night so he doesn't have to get up early but he wants to be with me. So he goes home at night and loves going through the tortures in the morning of getting ready and helping. But he's a good help. It's good to have, my oldest is 10 and my youngest is 3. [My mother is] pretty much the caregiver for my son.

Women expressed the necessity to organize childcare options before entering the industry. One of the women enrolled in a training course at the time of the interview explained how she had pre-arranged childcare even before starting the course: "My sister's going to watch my kids while I'm working. We made that agreement before I took this course."

Another participant depended on a combination of daycare and her parents to handle childcare needs. As well, she was required to travel frequently for her job, which presented a problem since her child's daycare was only available from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. When asked how she overcame this obstacle, she stated: "I had to depend on my parents. It was basically thrown on my parents." In another position, she encountered greater challenges with childcare. She stated:

I was bringing my daughter into work at 4:00 a.m. I had little blankets set up for her underneath my desk and she would have to sleep there then get somebody to pick her up at 8:00 a.m to go to school. She had to come back, basically sit here because sometimes I wouldn't even get out of there until 3:00 or 4:00 in the

morning and have to be back there for 6:00 a.m. Sometimes I [had] to sleep in the office.

Of the 9 women interviewed, four were grandmothers. Of those, two also stated that they were the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. As a result of these childcare responsibilities, they also spoke of the patchwork of help they needed to continue in their positions. In one situation, the participant stated that when she started her job with the mine, she did not require childcare as her children were grown. However, her situation changed with the sudden death of her daughter. She was left to care for her grandson, at which point she did find daycare. Another grandmother relied on a babysitter for her granddaughter:

I always had a babysitter. I only ever had the one little girl. I kept her all the time. So I always had a babysitter for this one. Wherever I went I took her with me and when she went to school, she went to school and she had to have a babysitter for after school until 6:30, a couple of hours everyday. So that went well.

This same woman also unexpectedly became the primary caregiver for several additional grandchildren. She explained:

And then just recently, my oldest daughter lost her two kids [to CFS] and I went to get my granddaughter out to bring her home. She's 11 years old, so I'm looking after her now. And then my other daughter lost her two kids and I had said [to CFS] "no you are not taking my grandchildren, I am going to look after them". And they said "well you're getting old" and [I said] "I don't feel old" I said "I could still do it. I raised 8 of my own kids, I still could raise more kids". That's the way I looked at it and I'm happy.

When asked how she was going to handle working on top of her new childcare demands, she replied, "I'm going to cross shift with my daughter. My daughter will do seven days. When she's finished her seven days, she's going to baby-sit for me. I do my seven days and I'll keep her daughter. So we are going to work it out like that."

As a result of these conversations with the women and given the obvious challenges around childcare, they were asked if a possible solution would be to have daycare on-site. One participant explained while this is a good idea in principle, other challenges would arise.

It would be easier. It would be a lot easier. Especially for the ones that have kids that don't go to school. How would you transport them from here if they have to start at 8 and school doesn't start until 9? How would they transport from the mine to the school?

Another did not think that the employer should be fully responsible for a daycare centre, but rather this could be a collaborative effort between the community and the company. In other words, childcare supports should be done in partnership.

While many women struggled with juggling work and childcare issues generally, most of the women also reported flexibility with taking time off for family-related issues, like sickness or school-related activities. One woman stated:

I just explained to [my boss] my oldest son was born with a heart murmur. So I told him after he interviewed me, before he even hired me, that if he gets sick, I have to go, I have to take him to Winnipeg. I explained everything to him and he said that's fine. I said most of the time my mother will be there to assist with it and he said it's no problem.

One of the participants caring for grandchildren had also experienced flexibility with regard to child care issues:

Like my boss that I work with, he really understands that I have grandchildren here. They are really good with me. They don't give me a hard time if I can't make it in, well I just call in. I just call in but I always make sure that there is someone in there to do the work.

While these women are grateful for flexibility related to family issues, they also both noted that they also let their employer know that they had a back-up on hand. In the one case, the woman stated that her mother would help out when possible and the other said she would find someone to replace her shifts when she could not get to work. This then should not be considered full flexibility for working mothers.

This is more apparent in the case of one participant who was required to travel to remote communities with her job. While her employer knew she was a single mother and did not have childcare for these travel periods, it was suggested that she take her young daughter with her on the road. At times she had to travel on winter roads with the temperature falling below minus 30 degrees Celsius. In her own words:

The lectures did come in, I mean, he would just not understand. My daughter was sick a lot when she was younger. [T]he team [could not] run without me. It would not run without my passwords, the pressure was always on me. There's times I had to take her to work with me because my team [could not] run unless I was there.

Women-Centred Supports and Designated Spaces

Most women stated that they felt welcomed and comfortable in male-dominated working environments, such that are the case with non-traditional and resource

extractive industries. According to one participant, she stated, “Nobody’s put me down or anything. Everybody treats everybody equal.” Another woman explained how her upbringing prepared her for her present work environment, “[G]rowing up in a small town, I grew up with my cousins and most of them are males, most of them really don’t bother me that there are more male figures around me. No it doesn’t bother me.”

One woman, who was in training at the time of the interview, was asked how she felt about going into a male-dominated industry. She responded, “I don’t see a problem with it because I’m confident, I’m vocal. And to be in my age I’ve worked in work places where they had to deal with some issues, I don’t think it would be too much of a challenge for me.”

One woman, who worked as a cage tender, shared an anecdote related to her interaction with her male coworkers:

[O]ne of the miners asked me to bring down a jackleg. Two jacklegs² were sitting on surface to come down to thousand. He said, ‘I don’t need them for myself but I need them for my crew shift. As long as they are here by the end of my shift.’ So I was coming down, the shift changed and the men were coming up and it was about 10 to 5 and I had 2 jacklegs on the cage. Now when I got to a thousand, all the men were standing there waiting for their ride up and I thought to myself, ‘okay if I took one jackleg at a time, then I’m going to have to climb through the men and get them. I’m going to take them both at the same time. I didn’t even think of it. I grabbed them both and I walked off the cage and you have all these men laughing, pointing, and I said, ‘did I do something wrong? Is there something on me?’ And I was walking and I had these jacklegs, and they’re about 130 + pound each, in each arm. I said, ‘is something wrong?’ And they said, ‘No no, most women won’t even touch one, never mind two at the same time.’ I just flung them up on the lay down and said, ‘Get in the cage, let’s go.’ You know, I think I got along with everybody there.

One woman clarified that although she was working within a male-dominant industry, she was a cook within the kitchen with primarily other women. She reported that everyone got along well.

The women were also asked about whether there were specific spaces within their industry workplaces which were designated for women. Almost all affirmed that there were such spaces, and they were sufficient. One woman pointed out that the camp where she worked had plenty of women-designated spaces: “Actually one part of the camp is designated for women and it’s also the non-smoking trailer. They have their own, the women’s bathroom and everything.” Other women confirmed

² Jackleg refers to air-powered drills used by miners to drill holes for explosives or bolts underground.

that their workplaces had separate locker areas and washrooms for men and women.

One woman, employed as a housekeeper at a mining camp, stated that women were comfortable living within the camp. They have their own trailer and washrooms. She elaborated on the layout of the camp:

We have a non-smoking room where the women should be staying. We don't have them mixing. We have 5 trailers in camp but there is a certain place where the women have to stay and there is a ladies washroom for them on one side and there's another mixed washroom there.

Though the women generally seemed satisfied with their spaces in the work environment, one woman did mention an issue regarding bathrooms, particularly those underground. This was specific to needing a woman-designated washroom for miners. This specific issue is described further below.

Camp Life

Though most of the women did not live in industry camps, a few were in a position to share their experiences there. One woman, who worked as a cook at a hydro camp recounted that the rooms were nice but rules were strictly enforced. Similarly another woman, who lived in the camp, recounted the recent toughening of rules around the presence of liquor in the camp:

They were allowed alcohol in their rooms but no drugs. But now, they're not allowed nothing. You cannot take alcohol there, you can't smoke, you can't do this. No other camps have been like that, maybe new management, different management. They have a bar. But before they were allowing liquor.

The women were asked if they thought drugs and alcohol were readily available in camps. One stated that she had heard rumours, but could not say for sure if there was drug activity. However, she did mention that the amount of drug use in the larger community seemed to have recently increased in the community. She recommended that a sort of drug use prevention program may be a good idea for the community, to be delivered in partnership with the school.

One woman, who did not live in the camp, stated that she noticed alcohol being brought into the camp, even though it's supposed to be a dry camp. However, she did not see this as a major issue:

I notice alcohol. It's supposed to be a dry camp but I do see people taking in beer. You can't really, they're adults, they know enough. They're not having big parties or something but after work they want to sit and have a beer and not want to go to the bar. They sit in their room I guess. I know there are no parties.

Workplace Harassment

When asked if they had ever personally experienced or witnessed other women experiencing workplace harassment, the women offered a variety of responses. Three women stated that this issue had not come up for them. One replied, “No, I haven’t heard of any,” and another stated “I have never felt unsafe ever, even around men because I find I can be assertive when I need to be. I’ve always felt safe at work.” One interviewee stated that she had never experienced or witnessed harassment, and that channels existed to deal with any issue which may arise, “We have a camp manager so if anything should go wrong, we go and see our camp manager and take our problems to him but not once did I ever know of anything [going] wrong at this camp in all the years that I’ve been there.”

However, three women shared anecdotes about harassment they had experienced from male coworkers or supervisors. These experiences were both overt expressions of men not wanting women to be part of the workforce or not showing consideration for the sex-based differences between men and women workers - such as the personal hygiene needs around menstruation. There were also blatant sexualized overtones made towards the women workers. In addition, women also experienced more subtle and covert forms of harassment, such as being targeted for work related issues. The following accounts give voice to these experiences. To begin, one woman shared the following account:

I experienced harassment with my last job with a couple of piping guys. My boss pretty much took care of that right away, fast. I was so upset, I left my office, left my site. I called him right away and told him I quit my job. I can’t handle these guys and they are doing [whistling noises] they are doing stuff like that and they are going like [gesturing] to themselves, and I was like, ‘can you guys stop that already?’ There’s three guys in particular. They kinda giggled about it. And then the next morning, I was going through files and they come in and go, ‘what’s the matter? Are you crabby? Didn’t get laid last night?’ little comments like that...’ [I]t’s none of your business if I did or didn’t’ and they kinda did the [whistling noise] again. They used to do that. And I said, ‘you know what I’ve had enough.’ I left the site, went home and my boss called me from Alberta and asked what happened and said, ‘oh I have to talk to those guys and they don’t want to see you go.’

Another woman spoke to the directed sexism she experienced at work. To quote:

Yes actually when I first started a gentleman came and he saw me sitting there and he swore. He no longer works here. He swore and he said, ‘What the F? We have women working here now? Don’t you have anything better to do than coming to work down here with the men?’ And I said, ‘Excuse me? I’ll have you know I went to university and I had a good job before I came here. I have bills to

pay just like everyone else.’ Then I said, ‘If you have a problem with that, take it to my supervisor.’ And he said, ‘Oh and you have balls too.’ And I got upset over it. After he realized that I wasn’t just the typical girly-girl, that I was capable of doing my job, he changed his ways. But other than that, I had no problems.

When asked what was done in response to this issue, she stated that she talked to an instructor at the University College of the North with whom she had taken courses. She did not mention if the issue had been formally resolved, but added:

I didn’t find that when he swore at me like that, I didn’t find it to be harassment, I just found he was intimidated that I was down there. Scared that I might be able to do a little more than he could because I’ve been told numerous times that I can work circles around these men.

This same woman also mentioned an incident with a male coworker that arose over her need to have access to a washroom while she was menstruating. She stated:

I had my ‘womanlies’ and I came in for overtime and I told him, I don’t want to go to the rock breaker because the rock breaker’s at 950 and to be at the rock breaker, as a woman yourself, you want to be clean and you only have these porta-potties there. And I told him, I need to have access to the bathroom, I’ll be on the cage, I won’t go to the rock breaker but I will be on the cage. And he made that day hard for me. And I told him, ‘I don’t think I should have to advertise to all the men that I have my period and that I don’t want to be at the rock breaker where there’s no bathroom. Because once you start breaking rock, you’re not going to get the chance to stop. You have to keep going, going, going...sometimes they go full 10 hours and there’s no breaks. Some of those guys are eating and working at the same time.’ And how I said it to him, ‘I’m sorry I’m being a girly-girl right now, I need to be by the bathroom.’ And then he pushed me, pushed me. He made my job hard that day. And then finally I phoned up. I phoned the office and said, ‘find another cage tender, I can’t work like this.’ I went and talked to my supervisor about that. I made it clear that I’m not being ignorant by asking for the cage. I’m on my ‘womanlies’ and I need to be near a bathroom where I can wash my hands and be able to do what a woman does and wash my hands when I’m done. And he’s fine with it. I said, I don’t need to tell all of you that this is why I need to be on the cage. That’s a hard part for women. That’s the only downfall I think through out the whole thing that monthly thing and you cannot use that as an excuse to miss work. It cannot be a reason why I cannot be at work. That’s my only issue with working underground.

She recommended a port-a-potty just for the women would address this issue although this would be difficult to implement. She stated, “It would be hard because what if I was working down 1000 foot. It’s hard because there is no running water to use the bathroom and to wash your hands down there. And that’s a problem that I don’t think will ever be fixed. We are working on a mine.”

One woman, who worked in a mine lab, reported “subtle and hidden” harassment she experienced from her immediate supervisor. In this situation, he was accusing her of not “pulling” her weight at work when she had arrived 15 minutes late for a shift. Instead of giving her a warning, he immediately made a formal complaint of her work. In her estimation, she was being targeted as a female employee and took particular offence when he told her that.

[I] got to work, 15 minutes after my shift started he called me up to his office. He was writing me up for not working. I was quite insulted. I told him, ‘I always do whatever I can. I’m always working. I’ve never, ever been accused of not working, ever.’ I said, ‘something’s going on here. Are you sure it’s not a personality conflict? Are you sure it’s not me you have a problem with?’ And he said to me, ‘no, if I’d seen you in a bar, I’d buy you a drink.’ And I could not freakin’ believe what I was hearing I’d buy you a drink or have a drink with you one of the two. Oh my God we are at a work setting and you are talking about buying me a drink at a bar.

Gender and Race-Based Discrimination

While many of the women felt that they were treated equally to the men in their workplace, there were a few exceptions. One woman pointed out that there was still a discrepancy in pay between male and female workers. She recounted that this is “[S]till a huge issue.” She went on to state that despite being a team leader, she was only making 25 cents more than her subordinate male coworkers.

A few women recounted incidents that showed not only how they were treated differently based on their gender or Aboriginal ancestry but also based on these characteristics *combined*. For instance, one interviewee described how she felt she had to ‘prove’ herself, not only because she was an Aboriginal person, but because she was an Aboriginal *woman* specifically:

I started off at the mine there as a crusher. I was able to do my job as good or even better than my male counterparts because I use logic and I have a very physics-friendly mind. I gave it my best shot because I was an Aboriginal person first of all. I know how people see us, expect us to be and I blew that under the water. And the fact that I was Aboriginal only made me stronger because I had a bigger bag with me of the grief and hurt that our people have been put through because they are Aboriginal. Things I learned along the way make me more determined to succeed in whatever I’m doing because I am Aboriginal and because I am a female Aboriginal.

The same participant spoke about her supervisor, and the difference between his treatment of her versus his treatment of her non-Aboriginal female coworkers. According to her, differential treatment that is gender and race-based continues today within these work environments. In her own words:

I think my immediate supervisor had a problem with me being Aboriginal and being a women and being outspoken but I know at the end he had a lot of respect for me. He was very appreciative of me at the end of the day. But I had to fight for that. There's other women I worked with in that lab that are non-Aboriginal and I see the difference. I had to earn that respect or should I say, I had to poke and prod at it until he dished it out. In other words, I have to prove myself time and time again. Working out there, I've seen the grief our people went through. I know some women that went through the mill, the hardships.

Health and Safety

The 2 women in training affirmed that they had received health and safety training upfront, but did not elaborate on their feelings about this training. One woman, who was working in an office, felt that health and safety issues were being adequately addressed: "The safety reps and everything, they have their monthly meetings and whatever comes up they share with us. We have our own little bulletin board, so they put it up and make sure that everybody knows to come and read it."

However, more than half of the women did report injuries sustained at work. One woman reported an incident which occurred with a contractor. She stated:

[T]hey did not tell me to wear a face mask or a respirator and I was cutting those 20 mm re-bars in ½ inches long. They didn't tell me that I could wear a face mask or anything or a respirator or something, I was sitting there cutting those things all day and I was breathing in those small pieces for metal. It made me sick. I was actually throwing up chunks of metal. I think that was a health concern with myself. I have a bit of a lung problem. I missed some days at work but did come back. But I was so sick on my first day, I threw up and threw up and it was black and it really scared me. I went to the nurse and [she] asked me what I did. I didn't really know about that kind of safety. That was my first labour job, like in the industry. So I really didn't know enough and just did it, I just kept on doing it and doing it all day until I was done. That was the only thing I can think of.

Another woman, a cage tender, explained that she was injured on the cage when she first started her position:

When I first started, I got hurt on the cage actually. It was due to inexperience. [The] cage dropped while I was holding the chains. It's a safety procedure and the hoist operator tried a new technique. He pressed the dynamic brake and when he pressed the cage it dropped while I was holding the chains, causing me to rip my muscle and stretch my nerves. Took me over a month and a half. I still went to work but only did light duty. It was driving me up the wall because I like working and I could not sit in the office anymore. What do I do, I can't do this. I

want to get back to work. So I pushed and pushed. I went to physiotherapy, got an MRI. They told me that it was healing alright and they put me back to work.

One woman had to quit her job as a camp cook due to arthritis. She stated, "I was lifting those big trays all the time, lifting and lifting. Trays of bacon, trays of sausages, pots of soup. Just my feet and my arm bothering me all the time. My arm and neck, I thought it was just stress due to lifting. There's a lot of stress."

Another woman, a housekeeper at a camp, explained why she was on sick leave:

My hands really burnt up. I can't really tell you exactly what went wrong but my hands really went bad. Those chemicals that we were using they had just burnt right to the skin. I couldn't really tell you what was the cause of it. That's really the only thing that went wrong with me in there. So I took sick leave for three months. So that's all I can say, that's the only thing that ever went wrong.

This woman did affirm that her hands were much better now, since she had been off work. She of other employees to support her as stressors, along with pressure from her bosses to engage in illegal actions to keep the airport running. She described some of the tasks she was coerced into performing:

[W]hen I was balancing thing(s) out on the plane, they told me that when [the plane was] overweight, they would say mix those numbers to make that red mark go away. They got me playing with numbers and [subtracting] the weight so we were never on the red. It was very stressful for me. You got each person who has 600 lbs of groceries and [I had to] make a decision on how this is going to fit in the plane. So I will have people calling and yelling at me over something I have no control [over]. That's when the overloading of the plane [started].

Further, this woman reported that there were no services in the workplace to help her deal with her stress and anxiety.

In Sum

Without doubt there is the need for the creation of daycares, where they do not exist, and for more childcare spaces where they do. Certainly the women made clear that without this basic social service, they will never be full (let alone partial) participants within northern economic development. In terms of the designated spaces within the workplace, with the exception of underground washroom facilities, the industries appear to be meeting the needs of women employees. Where there is more room for work is related to the ongoing experiences of workplace sexual harassment and intimidation alongside gender and race-based discrimination. This goes on despite the fact that many of the women indicated that they were able to stand up for themselves and were vocal when they needed to be. The women also stated a need for more professional development related to

workplace health and safety as more than half of them expressed having experienced a work related injury, stress or anxiety.

PART 4

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project was designed to better understand the various factors and issues concerning Aboriginal women employed in non-traditional industries in Northern Manitoba. The 9 women participants provided their unique perspectives into the challenges and opportunities regarding recruitment, training and employment within these industries. Although the responses were overwhelmingly positive, a number of recommendations arose from this study.

PWHCE hopes to take a similar exploration in Saskatchewan to see whether the results would be the same or provide insights into different experiences of Aboriginal women in non-traditional and resource extractive industries.

Recommendations

This project was an exploration into some of the gendered socio-economic and health issues experienced by Aboriginal women working within or training for employment within non-traditional industries. These are the principle recommendations that resulted from conversations with the women who participated in the study.

Training Opportunities for Increasing the Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal Women within non-Traditional and Resource Extractive Industries

Income Transition and Money Management

- ⇒ *Develop personal training opportunities to assist new Aboriginal women employees to manage the transition from social assistance to earned income.*
- ⇒ *Tailor workshops on money management for current Aboriginal women employees.*

Gender-Based Rights in the Workplace

- ⇒ *Introduce mandatory gender-based analysis training for employees across all positions, including management, to foster a workforce where there is zero tolerance for gender-based sexual harassment or intimidation.*
- ⇒ *Revisit and revise wage levels between men and women employees to ensure pay equity for comparable positions.*

Aboriginal Rights in the Workforce

- ⇒ *Institute Aboriginal awareness workshops within training and professional development for employees across all positions, including management, in order to challenge and eradicate workplace racism.*

Workplace Health and Safety

- ⇒ *Ensure proper and ongoing health and safety training for Aboriginal women employees to reduce potential workplace injuries.*

Social Supports for Increasing the Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal Women within non-Traditional and Resource Extractive Industries

Childcare

- ⇒ *Engage industries and surrounding communities to jointly offset the patchwork of childcare currently available to Aboriginal women through the creation of daycares (in communities where no daycare currently exists) or the provision of more childcare spaces (in communities where there are daycares).*
- ⇒ *Ensure flexibility of childcare services to take into account shift, weekend, extended and irregular work hours required by the workplace.*
- ⇒ *Rethink how industries can accommodate transportation, scheduling and childcare needs for school-aged children (i.e. before and after school programs).*

Women-Designated Spaces

- ⇒ *Continue to provide women designated spaces including washrooms, showers and living quarters.*
- ⇒ *Construct underground washrooms (inmines) for women.*

Recreational Activities

- ⇒ *Improve the quality of life within on-site camps through the introduction of recreational activities, including bonspiels, skating rinks, weight and games rooms and other social events.*

PART 5

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Appendix 1

Aboriginal Women and Extractive Industries INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information

[Skip this section if the demographic questionnaire was previously completed in the focus group sessions.]

1. Can you tell me how old you are right now?
2. How do you identify yourself as an Aboriginal woman?
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
4. What is your current employment status?
5. What is your main source of income right now?
6. What is your approximate yearly household income?

Questions referring to extractive industry employment

7. What industry so you work for: mining or hydro?
8. How did you become aware of employment in the industry?
9. What were your reasons for entering the mining/hydro industry?
10. Were you required to take a training program before entering the workforce?
11. Did you receive training? By whom and for how long?
12. Can you speak about your training experience?
13. Did you think you received enough training to enter the mining/hydro industry?
14. What were your first impressions of working within the mining/hydro industry?
15. What position do you hold in the industry you work in?
16. Did you have access to support services in making your transition to this career?
17. Do you think that the resource industries have lead to greater economic development within your region/community?

18. Has your perception of the industry changed as a result of working there?

19. Would you recommend a career within this industry to other Aboriginal women?

20. What other services would you like the companies to have in supporting Aboriginal women workers?

21. Could you identify how your life has changed as a result of working for the mining/hydro industry?

Housing

22. What is your current housing situation?

23. Are you currently living on your own or with a partner?

24. Do you have any dependents currently living in your household?

25. Did you need to move for your job in the mining/hydro industry? If so, how difficult was it to find a new home?

26. Has your employment changed your housing costs?

27. Do you live in a camp for employees?

Childcare

28. Are you doing shift work?

29. What are your hours and work schedule?

30. Do you require childcare?

31. Do you have access to quality/subsidized childcare?

32. If you are not using a childcare centre, who helps you most with the children?

33. How often would you say you see your children outside of work?

34. Do you feel that you are missing out on anything with their lives?

35. Have they said anything to you about your work?

36. Do you feel your employer would understand if you needed to take time off for family-related issues, like sickness, school-related activities etc.?

Women-centered Social Supports

37. Do you see the industry as a male-dominated workplace? What are your thoughts of working within this environment?

38. Have you been welcomed within the industry?

39. Are there spaces within the workplace designated for women (i.e. change rooms/showers/camps etc?)

40. Do you think that the industry needs to have women-designated spaces?

41. Have you experienced workplace harassment, either from supervisors/co-workers? Have you seen other women in such situations? If so, was there any remediation?

42. In your opinion, are women and men treated differently within the workplace? What about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers/men and women?

43. Are there many other women and Aboriginal women in the workforce? What positions do they hold?

Health and Safety

44. Are you aware of any health-specific problems that can come about through working within mining/hydro?

45. Can you tell me about your diet when you are in the camp?

46. Do you have access to nutritious food?

47. How would you explain life in the camp?

48. Are alcohol and drugs readily available?

49. Have you used alcohol and drugs while living in the camp?

50. How does your life change when you go back home?

51. Does your work situation cause you stress or anxiety?

52. Have you ever had an accident or injury while in the workplace?

53. Are there any services in the workplace to help you with stress/anxiety?

Money Management

54. What was your economic situation before you worked in the industry?

55. How has this changed as a result of working for the company?

56. How do you feel about your income?

57. What was it like to receive your first paycheck?

58. How are your personal money management skills (i.e. budgeting)?

59. Does your income allow you to cover all of your bills and expenses?

60. Have there been unforeseen expenses?

61. Has your income positively affected your life and family? How?

62. Were there any negative effects of having an increased income? What were they?

63. What might be some strategies for better money management?

64. In your opinion, should companies be providing money management training as part of their overall preparation for workforce participation?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about your own experiences with working in the resource extraction field. Your assistance in this project is greatly appreciated.